

January 2019

INTERNATIONAL

US-China Relations

Jan. 28—The US Justice Department announces criminal charges against the leading Chinese telecommunications company, Huawei Technologies, and its chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou. One indictment accuses the company of stealing technological trade secrets from US-based competitor T-Mobile. The other accuses Meng and Huawei of violating US sanctions against Iran and related obstruction of justice and fraud. US officials say they will seek to extradite Meng from Canada, where she was detained in December 2018 at the request of the US.

BRAZIL

Jan. 1—Jair Bolsonaro is sworn in as president and immediately begins implementing the far-right agenda he campaigned on. His 1st actions include eliminating the Labor Ministry, downgrading protection of LGBT rights and indigenous lands, and a decree making it easier to purchase guns.

COLOMBIA

Jan. 17—In Bogotá's worst attack in years, a car bombing kills at least 20 people at a police academy. The suicide bomber is linked with the National Liberation Army, a small guerrilla group that was not party to a 2016 peace agreement between the government and the far larger Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF

Jan. 10—The Independent National Election Commission releases the delayed results of the Dec. 30 presidential contest and declares Felix Tshisekedi the winner. Independent observers including the Catholic Church had asserted that another opposition candidate, Martin Fayulu, won by a large margin. Fayulu alleges that Tshisekedi struck a secret agreement with outgoing President Joseph Kabila, who held office since 2001 and delayed the election long after his final term expired in 2016. Tshisekedi is sworn in Jan. 24.

GUATEMALA

Jan. 7—President Jimmy Morales says he is shutting down the UN-backed International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and expelling its foreign staff from the country. CICIG had pushed to prosecute Morales for campaign finance violations and charged his son and brother with fraud.

Jan. 9—The Constitutional Court, the nation's top tribunal, blocks Morales's order, but CICIG's foreign staff leave the country after the government says it can no longer guarantee their protection. Thousands of Guatemalans take to the streets Jan. 12 in protest.

HUNGARY

Jan. 5—In some of the most widespread demonstrations against right-wing Prime Minister Viktor Orbán since his Fidesz party secured a parliamentary majority in 2010, 1,000s of protesters organized by opposition parties and trade unions march against a labor reform dubbed the "slave law." It allows companies to compel employees to work up to 400 hours of overtime each year and delay paying wages for up to 3 years. Demonstrations against the law have continued since it was signed Dec. 12. Protesters have also called for restoring independent courts and media.

MACEDONIA

Jan. 25—The Greek parliament narrowly votes to ratify an agreement for the former Yugoslav republic to its north to adopt the

name North Macedonia. The vote was preceded by months of protests in Greece. Opponents warn that recognizing Macedonia will embolden it to make territorial claims to Greece's north-central region of the same name. The accord makes it possible for the smaller country to join NATO and the EU, moves previously blocked by Greece.

PHILIPPINES

Jan. 21—In a referendum in Mindanao, 85% of voters back a plan to create a new autonomous region in the mostly Muslim south, which has endured secessionist violence and terrorist attacks for decades. The vote ratifies an agreement under which the main rebel group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, will drop its demand for an independent state and demobilize its fighters in exchange for a role in government.

Jan. 27—Two bomb explosions at a cathedral on southern Jolo island kill 22 people. The bombings are linked to Abu Sayyaf, a group that was excluded from the Mindanao peace process.

POLAND

Jan. 14—Pawel Adamowicz, the liberal mayor of Gdansk, dies a day after he is stabbed at a charity event by an assailant who blames him for a criminal conviction. Adamowicz, a vocal supporter of rights for immigrants and other minorities, was a prominent opponent of the ruling right-wing populist Law and Justice party. Thousands of Poles join protests across the country against violence and hate speech.

SUDAN

Jan. 29—The government says it will release 100s of protesters detained by security forces over the past month in nationwide demonstrations sparked by a deepening economic crisis and opposition to President Omar al-Bashir, an autocrat in power since 1989. At least 29 protesters have been killed since the demonstrations began in December when the government moved to triple the price of bread.

TAIWAN

Jan. 2—Chinese President Xi Jinping calls for Taiwan's unification with the mainland and warns that China could use military force to prevent any move toward formal independence. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen Jan. 5 rejects Xi's remarks and calls for international support for the island's democratic self-rule.

UNITED KINGDOM

Jan. 15—The House of Commons rejects Prime Minister Theresa May's deal for withdrawing from the EU in a 432–202 vote, as 118 members of May's Conservative Party break ranks to vote against her. May says she will seek to revise the deal, though she had previously insisted the EU would accept no changes.

VENEZUELA

Jan. 23—At a massive protest in Caracas, Juan Guaidó, the head of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, declares himself "interim president." His claim is promptly recognized by the US and other nations in the region. President Nicolás Maduro, who was sworn in for a 2nd term 2 weeks earlier despite alleged election fraud and a severe economic crisis, cuts diplomatic ties with the US.

Jan. 28—The US announces sanctions against the Venezuelan state oil company, whose exports to the US have been the Maduro government's top revenue source. ■